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Letter dated 26 February 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to bring to your attention the following grave development concerning the destruction of the cultural identity of the occupied part of Cyprus:

As you know, the protection, maintenance and restitution of all historic buildings belonging to all faiths in Cyprus, in both the free and the occupied areas, is of paramount significance to the Government of Cyprus because these historic buildings reflect the unique and varied history and culture of Cyprus.

The Armenian monastery of St. Makar, built in the tenth century and well known for its monastic order, spiritual contribution and cultural activities throughout the centuries, is one of these historic buildings. St. Makar, furthermore, is considered to be one of the most significant places of worship for the Armenian people in general and for the Armenians of Cyprus in particular. For centuries it served as a shrine and as a resting place for Armenian pilgrims visiting the Holy Land and stood as a landmark for all Armenians in their religious and spiritual quest.

Today, this once vibrant and significant monastery, after being looted, vandalized and partly destroyed, is abandoned and in ruins. It has been abandoned since 1974, when the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus blocked the access of the Armenians to the monastery.

Recently the Turkish Cypriot press announced plans for the conversion of the monastery into a 50-bed hotel. This conversion is in violation of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Furthermore, this planned

illegal conversion of the St. Makar monastery will do irreparable damage not only to the Armenian people and the Armenian Church but also to the cultural and historical character of Cyprus.

This latest development is but another cogent example of Turkey's intransigence, intentions and determination to alter the indigenous character of the occupied area of Cyprus. Disregarding all international agreements, violating the basic tenets of civilization and desecrating what is sacred and holy to the people of Cyprus, Turkey is proceeding in a calculated and well-executed plan to alter a civilization that has lasted for more than 8,000 years.

I would be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Sotos ZACKHEOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative